

Unit Two- Lesson Two: The Russian Revolution of 1917

Brainstorming Question

- What do you know about the Russian Revolution?

Competencies

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Discuss the February Revolution and the Transitional Government;
- Outline the evolution of the Bolsheviks party;
- Identify the major programs of the Bolsheviks party; and
- List down the causes and results of the October Revolution

Lesson Overview

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a political movement in Russia that climaxed in 1917 with the overthrow of the Provisional Government that had replaced the Russian monarchy. The Revolution had two distinct phases. The first one was the February Revolution of 1917, which ended the autocracy of Tsar Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. The second phase was the October Revolution, in which the Soviets, led by Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik party, seized power from the Provisional Government.

1. Causes of the Russian Revolution

The causes of the Russian revolution were Russia's political, social, and economic problems. Politically, the people of Russia resented the dictatorship of Tsar Nicholas II. The losses that the Russians suffered during World War I further undermined the monarchy. Socially, the despotic Tsarist regime had oppressed the peasant class for centuries. This caused unrest in rural areas. Economically, widespread inflation and famine in Russia contributed to the revolution. All these led to the Russian Revolution.

2. The Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks (a Russian word for "majority") were members of a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Following the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin seized power in Russia in 1917. The other faction of the RSDLP included the Mensheviks, (a term which means "minority"). After taking power the Bolsheviks changed their name to the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1918.

The Bolsheviks organized the party in a strongly centralized hierarchy. In contrast, the Mensheviks favored open party membership and wanted cooperation with other socialist and non-socialist groups in Russia. The Bolsheviks generally refused to cooperate with liberal (which they labeled "bourgeois") or even eventually other socialist organizations. Leon Trotsky was initially a Menshevik in 1903 but soon withdrew from the party. In 1917, he joined Lenin and became a Bolshevik.

3. The February 1917 Revolution

In February 1917, strikes and demonstrations by the workers of Petrograd escalated into a revolution. The Petrograd garrison joined the people, and the Tsar government collapsed. The February Revolution was a bourgeois revolution. It overthrew Tsarism and made Russia for a time more democratic.

4. The October 1917 Revolution

After the February Revolution, Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks party, returned to Russia from Switzerland, where he spent most of the war in exile. As soon as he arrived in Petrograd, Lenin persuaded the Bolshevik party to adopt his political line, which he put forward as what became known as Lenin's "April Thesis". He believed that there should be no support for the provisional government and the war and Russia should prepare for a socialist revolution. Lenin raised the slogan, "All powers to the soviet!"

From April to October 1917, the situation in Russia was favorable for revolution. The Bolsheviks party gained increasing support from the masses. The Bolshevik slogan "Peace! Bread! Land! "All power to the Soviets!" gained strong support. In October 1917, in a secret party meeting Lenin called for an insurrection to take power. On October 25, 1917, Lenin led the Bolsheviks in a nearly bloodless revolt against the ineffective Provisional Government. The October Revolution was based upon the ideas of Karl Marx. It marked the beginning of the spread of communism in the twentieth century. The Bolsheviks established a government called the Soviet Council of People's Commissars headed by Lenin and Trotsky as commissars of the Red Army and Minister of Foreign Affairs, with other Bolsheviks taking the other positions in the new Socialist government.

The Bolsheviks knew that Russia and the Russian army wanted peace very quickly. Therefore, immediately after the October Revolution, the new Bolshevik government proposed peace. In the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, Russia made a separate peace with the central powers. Germany dictated the terms of this treaty. In fact, Soviet Russia only got peace by ceding enormous areas of land, including the whole of Ukraine.

The Russian Revolution was one of the most important events in modern world history. Through Communism, Russia served as a model for third world countries seeking to modernize their governments. In addition, the fear of Communism spreading to eastern Europe during the Cold War also shows the global impact of the Russian Revolution.

Key Concepts and Terminology

- Revolution
- Bolsheviks
- Menshevik
- Tsar

